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ABSTRACT

Past and current education and language policy in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), which was formerly the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific, is discussed. Although under U.S. Navy administrative control since 1947, FSM is currently being divided into independent nations. The area has been influenced by colonization by Germany and Spain as well as by Japanese domination which ended with World War II. Over the last three decades, educational policy has vacillated between English-only instruction and primary language instruction as a tool for transition to English. Despite the fact that English has become a lingua franca in the Trust Territory and in FSM, the educational system has not developed approaches to develop English proficiency for Micronesian students. Overall problems of administering schools in a nation of diverse and distant islands are exacerbated by the multiplicity of languages and cultures, lack of standardized and disseminated orthographies, and insufficient or inadequate materials. Additional problems include lack of English proficiency among Micronesian teachers, resistance to primary language instruction on the part of Micronesian policymakers, and lack of consistent funding or support for bilingual education. (Author/SW)

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United States Language Policy in Micronesia:

A Study in Ambivalence

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ABSTRACT

United States Language Policy in Micronesia:
A Study in Ambivalence

Newly constituted from the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific, the Federated States of Micronesia is characterized by extreme linguistic and cultural heterogeneity, despite continuous colonial status over the last century.

The United States has had jurisdiction of the Trust Territory since World War II. Primary administrative responsibility for the islands was vested in the United States Navy, which established an interim government, and in 1951 turned jurisdiction over to the Department of the Interior.

Over the last three decades, educational policy has vacillated between English-only instruction and primary language instruction as a tool for transition to English. Despite the fact that English has become a lingua franca in the Trust Territory and in FSM, the educational system has not developed approaches to develop English proficiency for Micronesian students.

Overall problems of administering schools in a nation of diverse and distant islands are exacerbated by the multiplicity of languages and cultures, lack of standardized and disseminated orthographies, and insufficient or inadequate materials.

Additional problems include lack of English proficiency among Micronesian teachers, resistance to primary language instruction on the part of Micronesian policy makers, and lack of consistent funding or support for bilingual education.

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FSM: Geography and Languages

The Federated States of Micronesia is a political entity carved out of a large group of islands which until recently have constituted the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Spanning about 3,000 miles of the Pacific Ocean north of New Guinea and west of the Philippines, these approximately 2,100 islands and atolls, under United States administrative control since 1947, are currently being divided into independent nations. Presently in varying stages of negotiation and approval are: The Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Ongoing colonization of the islands began in the late 19th century with the arrival of missionaries from Germany and Spain, and continued into the 20th century with a period of intense domination by Japan beginning in 1920 and ending with World War II. The Japanese period was followed by United States domination of the Trust Territory under United Nations mandate. Despite nearly a century of rule by outside powers, the Trust Territory is marked by extreme linguistic and cultural heterogeneity.

The Federated States of Micronesia is a case in point. FSM is divided into four district, which are considered states in the new national format. Each district/state has an administrative center. The four capitals are (from east to west) Yap, Truk, Ponape and Kosrae. Each state also includes a number of smaller islands and atolls, which are significantly distant from their district

centers, given available means of travel, and significantly disparate from the district centers in terms of language and culture.

Linguistic diversity in FSM is startling. Ponape is perhaps the richest in terms of heterogeneity. Several dialects of Ponapeic (Rehg, 1981) are spoken in the district. These apparently related languages include Ponapean, Ngatikese, Mokilese and Pingelapese. Languages classified by Bender (1971) as Polynesian have a noticeable presence in the state of Ponape. Kapingamarangi, the language of a tiny atoll three degrees north of the equator, and Nukuoran, spoken in yet another outer island, are also represented in the district center. Immigrants from both places have settled in impoverished ghetto-like colonies in the district center along with small groups from other districts, who also maintain their languages.

Yapese is the language of Yap proper. Sohn (1975) points out that Yapese has "...no apparent close affinities within or without Micronesia." Woleaian is spoken on the atoll of Woleai, and "... also spoken, with slight dialectal variations..., on the neighboring islands, including Eauripik (population 150), Faraulep (150), Elato (50), Lamotrek (210), and Ifaluk (325)." (p. 5) Trifanovitch (1975) points out that many Yapese are multilingual and speak Ulithi and English, and that Japanese is still spoken to a limited extent in Yap, as is Palauan.

Bender (1971) identifies at least two major dialects of Trukese with several possible subdialects. Kosrae is the only district with

all of its population centered on one island, and it alone is characterized by linguistic homogeneity. There are 4,000 people living on Kosrae (Lee, 1975).

Language Policy and Education: Pre-World War II

Introduced by the missionaries in the latter part of the nineteenth century, formal schooling ~~remained~~ remained in the hands of clerics throughout the brief Spanish occupation (1866-99) and the subsequent and even briefer period of German control (1899-1914). Both the Spanish and German governments were primarily interested in exploiting available resources such as copra, and were content to allow the missionaries to pursue their objective of spreading Christianity, along with a cultural curriculum designed to further the economic agenda. German rule came to an abrupt end in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I and the Japanese annexation of the islands. Japan was awarded administrative control of Micronesia by a League of Nations mandate in 1920 (Weins, 1962).

Japanese colonial policy was geared towards economic development and "Japanization" of Micronesia. To implement these goals, a system of formal schooling was quickly created. Schools were established for the indigenous population which emphasized oral Japanese language.

Japanese influence was obliterated by the United States occupation of Micronesia after World War II. All Japanese people occupying the islands were repatriated and the extensive Japanese-built infrastructure was systematically dismantled. Eradication

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of Japanese cultural imprints was facilitated by the separatist approach of Japanese rule. Colonial and indigenous peoples had little contact (Kloss, 1977, p. 270). The efficacy of Japanese language policy, implemented by compulsory schooling, can be demonstrated however by the fact that people who were in school under Japanese mandate still use the language today (Ashby, 1983; Bender, 1971; Colletta, 1980).

United States Occupation, Education, and Language Policy in the Trust Territory

In the absence of an immediate decision at the end of World War II as to the status of the Pacific Islands taken from Japan, the Department of the Navy assumed administrative responsibility for the area. In September, 1945, the Marshalls, Carolines and Marianas were placed under naval jurisdiction. The Trusteeship was approved in July, 1947, and several departments of the federal government attempted to claim jurisdiction of the islands; but they remained in the hands of the Navy until 1951, when responsibility was transferred to the Department of the Interior.

Reports on education from the postwar military government and the interim government indicate that English was considered an essential component of formal schooling, but reveal an intent to maintain local languages. Richard states (1957) that directives from the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas specified:

> Education programs shall foster and encourage instruction in the native language and history in native arts and crafts. Instruction in the English language for natives of all ages is a prime necessity but this is not to be construed as discouraging instruction in native languages and cultures (p. 372).

To facilitate the transition from a military government to a civil administration, the Navy undertook the training of military personnel in a variety of fields including education. School of Naval Administration graduates in charge of education across the islands were to encounter problems. Textbooks and supplies were almost unobtainable. Intentions to provide materials in vernaculars were subverted by the fact that local languages did not have a literary tradition, and to the extent that there were written materials, orthographies were not standardized.

Teacher training presented particular problems: "Difficulties of transportation and attendance developed and emphases on the program varied depending upon both native and military government interest..." (Richard, 1957). Richard further reports that despite stated objectives to preserve local languages:

> One of the chief obstacles in every area was the lack of knowledge of English among the native, and because English had been designated the language of instruction, an intensive effort to teach it was mandatory. For many months teacher training consisted primarily of instruction in English (p. 380).

The establishment of a formal trusteeship in 1947 was accompanied by an administrative reorganization. In accordance with interim regulations, the Navy Staff Education Officer became the Director of Education in charge of schools, curriculum, supplies, and training. The position of Supervisor of Education Publications was created, with responsibilities which included research, writing, editing and production of materials in both English and indigenous languages. A Supervisor of Languages was to study indigenous languages, oversee translation of materials from English into vernaculars, promote the development of orthographies for vernaculars, and organize English classes for adults.

The government position during the interim period manifests an intention to maintain local languages in the Pacific Islands. Materials were produced in Woleai, Marshallese, Palauan and Kusaian under the interim administration. Attempts were also made to produce culturally relevant materials for English language instruction.

Recognition of the nature of the problems in carrying out those intentions was sharper than an awareness of the scope of those problems. In 1947 a group of scientists and linguists formed the Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA). CIMA set about developing and promoting standardized orthographies, despite resistance from church groups and government departments which were reluctant to revise materials already

produced and to retool for production of the new written formats. Standardized orthographies were to be years in the making however. Highly concentrated efforts to develop orthographies on the part of the University of Hawaii, begun in 1970, have been quite successful but the dissemination process is still going on in the islands today.

The final report of the interim government under the Department of Navy adheres to the objective of recognizing and maintaining local languages (1951):

> The local island language is taught and used as the medium of instruction during the first two years of elementary school. English is taught only conversationally until the third year when its study is increasingly emphasized. English is the language of instruction at the intermediate school level but lack of proficiency in it does not disqualify a student from attending an intermediate school. English is becoming a lingua franca of the Trust Territory but the promotion of literacy in island languages remains an important object of the educational program (p. 73).

The same report notes, however, that while indigenous languages were acceptable in lower courts, the language of higher courts was English. English had in fact assumed the role of an official language in the islands. Those who would seek positions in the power structure would need to gain proficiency in English.

After the assumption of administrative responsibility by the Department of Interior, U.S. government policy on language is increasingly characterized by ambivalence. The first report from the High Commissioner to the Secretary of the Interior (1952) contains a powerful statement on the importance of primary language instruction:

> The language program shall be designed to develop:
>
> (a) The content of expression and communication.
>
> (b) The oral and written media of expression and communication.
>
> Education should start where the pupils start with their mother tongue. In general, therefore, the medium of instruction in the elementary schools shall be the mother tongue of the pupils, even where that mother tongue is not an official dialect or the official language of the island. Because a person is effectively aided in reading and writing in a foreign language, literacy in the mother tongue will be one prerequisite of English. Teaching aids, texts, and other literature in all island languages shall be prepared, preferably as a part of the local guidance and advice.
>
> English is a secondary language in the trust territory (p. 54).

Nevertheless, the report goes on to state "English is the predominant language used in the intermediate schools, although the indigenous language is continued... The study of English

is given considerable emphasis at PICS (Pacific Islands Central School)." Emphasis on English increased as a student advanced up the grades. To the extent that vernacular instruction was considered, it was seen as appropriate only to primary level schooling, in what was essentially a transitional bilingual education model.

Two parallel sources of information are available to document objectives and programs in education in the Trust Territories: annual reports from the High Commissioner to the Secretary of the Interior, and annual reports from the Department of State to the United Nations. Both sets of reports indicate that during the 1950's, long-range plans to standardize and disseminate orthographies and develop vernacular materials were considered. In practice, emphasis on instruction in English was increasing. In 1959, the High Commissioner's report states:

> The Administration takes a realistic approach in planning to equip the students...for the kind of work and lives they will be following upon completion of their studies... Added effort has been put into the teaching of English as basic to achievement in whatever courses the students may pursue (pp. 29-30).

Trivanovitch (1971) reports that in 1961 Charles R. Hockett was retained as a consultant by the Director of Education to address the problems of language teaching in Micronesia. His notion that "It must be granted that time spent on activities

in native language is school time lost from learning English..." has been subverted by current research on transferability of concepts and skills in second language acquisition. Despite this perceived time loss, however, his recommendations favor primary language instruction in the early grades, with oral English until students can read their first language and have some oral proficiency in English. Hockett's report expressed concern for the affective implications of primary language suppression:

> In a bicultural (and bilinguistic) situation, it is all too easy to produce 'marginal men' who have no true sense of participation in either culture; the aim, of course, should be to produce people who have a sense of participation in both cultures. It is hard to see how neglect of and contempt for native language can contribute to this goal.

Hockett restates the problems of linguistic diversity, insufficient materials, lack of standardized orthographies and inadequately trained personnel.

In spite of support for native language instruction, and perhaps in response to the frustrating and seemingly immutable problems Micronesia presented for educators, a move towards imposition of English crystallized in 1962. The High Commissioner's report to the Secretary of the Interior states (1963):

> In 1962, the policy concerning use of English was completely revised. Former policy held that all

> instruction at the elementary school level should be in the vernacular. The new policy establishes English as the official medium of all instruction... The program of teaching English already is being implemented in schools where trained teachers are found. With the arrival this coming fall of the first vanguard of the U.S. teachers, teaching in English will become a reality in a substantial number of classrooms (p. 24).

It is interesting to note that a formal and overt position on English as the official medium of instruction for the Trust Territories came at a time when United States internal policy was expanding to include government support for vernacular language instruction. English-only instruction held sway in the islands until 1970, when the University of Hawaii undertook a major project to produce standardized orthographies, reference grammars, and bilingual dictionaries for Trust Territory languages. In 1971, a Chamorro-English bilingual program was initiated in Rota in the Marianas.

The availability of Title VII monies encouraged the expansion of efforts to provide bilingual instruction across the Trust Territories. The 1976 report of the State Department to the United Nations states (U.S. Department of State, 1976):

> The major thrust in language arts programs for the schools of the Trust Territory is now in the direction of bilingual education... In every district there are pilot

bilingual projects operating between grades one and eight, and three districts (Marianas, Palau and Yap) have pilot bilingual projects operating at the secondary school level (p. 106).

Current government reports indicate that curricular frameworks in the island nations include language arts in local languages. The University of Hawaii continues to support those efforts through the Pacific Area Language Materials Center which engages in materials production as well as staff development. Technical assistance is also provided by several United States universities, along with a multi-function center housed in the University of Guam.

Education and Language Policy in FSM Today: Directions and Problems

Grosjean (1982) suggests that governments can interact with language and generate policy through repression, neglect or support. Government support of a language can be operationalized through the schools and/or through a language planning body which sees to standardization and dissemination of the language. United States government policy in the Trust Territory over the last three decades has been ambivalent, seeming to lean at times toward support, at other times toward repression. What then are the education and language-related outcomes of United States domination in the Federated States of Micronesia?

English has become the lingua franca and has been chosen as the official language of FSM at the federal level. Currently promulgated state constitutions recognize local languages alongside English for

judicial and legislative purposes.

There is widespread agreement that oral and literacy skills in English are essential to the educational scheme. While proficiency in English is viewed as a basic educational objective, planning and implementation to that end are plagued by problems similar to those which faced U.S. Naval administrators almost thirty years ago.

The current educational model for FSM provides primary language instruction for the first three years of schooling (grades 1-3) accompanied by oral English instruction. English reading is introduced early, and after third grade instruction is supposed to be delivered exclusively in English.

Few Micronesian teachers are sufficiently proficient in English to deliver instruction in ESL or in content. English is not used in the broad social context. Only those teachers with resources to study in Guam, Hawaii, or the U.S. mainland ever receive sufficient exposure to English to achieve communicative competence.

New certification processes require that teachers hold at least a two year college degree. Many teachers, however, entered the field in the post-war period with barely an intermediate level education themselves. Years on remote atolls have done little to improve whatever English skills they may have had.

Availability of materials is still a serious problem. Despite many development efforts, materials in the local languages are scarce. There are almost no printing establishments or publishers in the

Federation and outside of school books and religious publications, there are no children's books, as we usually think of them, in the vernaculars.

The variety of local languages continues to complicate the issue, as does the fact that even now all orthographies have not been fully fixed, accepted or disseminated. The concept of orthography itself has still not taken full root. Even teachers in training programs spell their names in an inconsistent fashion, despite repeated warnings about the inflexibility of stateside university computers.

Books in English present problems of their own. Considerations of cultural relevancy are more pronounced in Micronesia than those encountered in United States programs for minority and limited English proficient children. For example, few Micronesian children have seen a horse or a train, except perhaps in American movies in district centers. Many Micronesian children would have difficulty conceptualizing a "mountain" in this world of tiny atolls and coral reefs.

Bilingual education encounters resistance from the newly formed Federation governments. Proficiency in English is seen as an important skill on the part of those who would assimilate Micronesia quickly into the modern world. Lack of understanding of the importance of primary language development to second language acquisition is as pervasive among the policymakers of Micronesia as it is elsewhere.

Finally, the best efforts of bilingual projects to overcome these difficulties tend to evaporate when U.S. Federal funds dry up. Capacity-building in bilingual education, difficult in the United States, is even more tenuous in this remote and under-structured environment.

The Federated States of Micronesia is currently in transition from political dependence to self-determination. Whether Micronesian leaders will seek to utilize the school system in a planned attempt to maintain regional languages alongside English, or whether regional languages and their speakers will lose ground in the struggle for modernization, is as yet undetermined.

Old colonial habits and structures die hard. The education system as it has been constituted until now has been ill-suited to sort out the problems presented by this small, but extremely diverse country. The legacy of ambivalence towards local languages, with an ongoing motif of the primacy of English, is the stuff with which Micronesian educators must work today.

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